

**Maximizing Subscriptions for  
E-mail Subscription Management Systems**

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## Introduction: Two Simple Steps to Improve Subscription Rates

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E-mail subscription management (“ESM”) systems make e-mail communication simple and more effective for public sector entities by automating the e-mail alert process. While implementing an ESM system requires minimal administrative effort, administrators must think about how to promote the service on the website and beyond in order to maximize the number of subscribers. From promoting the service on the website to tapping into local media coverage, this document outlines easy ways to make sure that the target audience knows about the service.

Maximizing subscription rates starts with effective ESM implementation on the website and continues with targeted promotions of the e-mail alert system. The following steps will help ensure ESM system success:

### 1. Effective ESM implementation

- a. Provide relevant content for subscribers
  - Offer many subscription items
  - Offer subscriptions to specific topics
- b. Place subscription links next to content of interest
- c. Include appropriate link descriptions and graphics
- d. Make the sign up process simple and secure

### 2. Targeted promotion generates jumps in the subscriber base

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## Guidelines for Effective ESM Implementation

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To ensure ESM success, subscriptions offered should be 1) relevant and 2) placed above or below content of interest.

### Provide Relevant Content

There are two ways to ensure that you are providing meaningful information to subscribers: 1) provide many subscription options and 2) offer subscriptions to specific topics rather than (or in addition to) general e-newsletters.

Giving citizens many subscription choices improves sign-up rates for e-mail updates. The odds that there will be an option that is relevant to a website visitor improve as the number of subscription items increases. ESM systems typically provide citizens with 10-40x more subscription options than e-mail list software. Additionally, ESM systems typically have 300-1,100 percent more subscribers than e-mail list software.

**ESM subscribers select an average of six subscriptions.**

Providing specific and relevant information ensures e-mails are relevant despite increasingly cluttered inboxes. General newsletters are often overlooked because they contain general, one-size-fits-all information that may or may not be relevant to the recipient. The typical click-through rate (i.e., the rate at which recipients of e-mails visit the website after receiving an e-mail) for an e-newsletter is 8.4 percent. When the recipient has the opportunity to subscribe to more specific information using ESM, the click-through rate typically jumps to well over 20 percent.

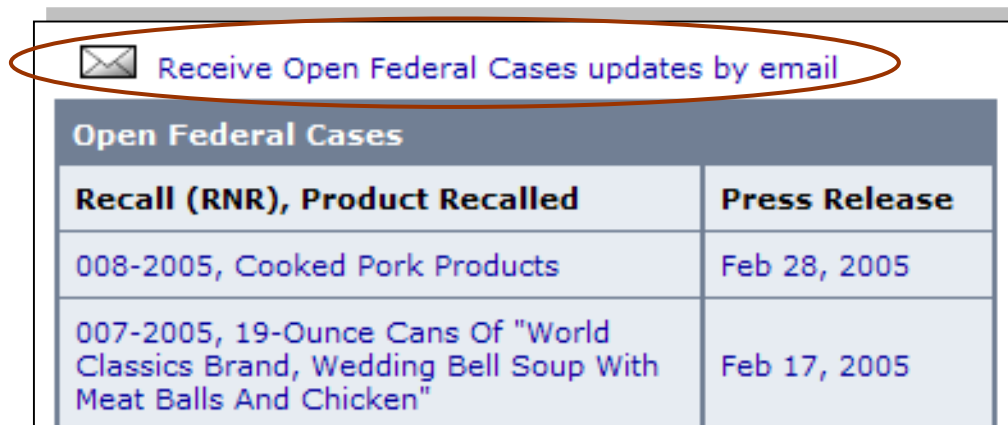
### Effective Link Placement

Another crucial matter is placing the links where website visitors will notice them. Site visitors are more likely to sign up for specific updates that are relevant to them, versus general topic e-mail alerts. Citizens do not typically come to an agency's homepage to specifically register for e-mail updates. Citizens come looking for information, so placing the subscription option above or just below the relevant information is most effective. Sign up rates decrease by 40-60% when links are placed on the left, right, or bottom of the page. Why does placement of the links affect the sign up rates? Citizens typically do not search for e-mail alert sign ups, but will respond to well-placed items. This is the browsing equivalent of an impulse buy, much like purchasing gum or mints in the supermarket. Shoppers do not necessarily go to the store with the specific intention of buying gum. Rather, people see it in the check-out lane and throw it in the cart because the product is in the right place at the right time.

### Proper Link Labeling

In addition to their proper placement above or below relevant information on the webpage, links should include the word "e-mail" in the offer and make clear which content is going to trigger a notice to the subscriber.

The picture below is taken from the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) website and is an excellent example of a clear and concise subscription description that uses the term "e-mail" and proper link placement above the content of interest.



## Effective Use of Graphics

Using a consistent graphic that clearly identifies a subscription option also increases the likelihood that citizens will subscribe. Improper labeling (e.g., using inconsistent descriptions or graphics) can decrease sign ups by more than 20%. The Oregon Department of Human Service website uses an envelope (see example below) as a clear indicator of a subscription item.




## Simple and Secure Sign-Up Process

Making the sign-up process simple and secure for subscribers is very important. Overwhelming them with options may deter them from registering. Each option or step a user must view or go through decreases the sign-up rate.

First, let users sign up for the option they selected. At this point, do not require them to supply more than their e-mail address and select an optional password to secure their account. Add a link to your privacy statement for those who are interested in it. Also, provide a link to more information about the subscription service for those individuals who want it but do not require site visitors to view this content. For first time users, confirm their sign-up to specific information then show a complete list of subscription options to give subscribers the opportunity to sign up for other alerts of interest. Finally, if necessary, ask for additional information (e.g. name, zip code, industry) from subscribers at the end of the sign up process.

## SIMPLE AND SECURE SIGN-UP (EXAMPLE FROM USDA)

 Receive Open Federal Cases updates by email

Open Federal Cases	
Recall (RNR), Product Recalled	Press Release
008-2005, Cooked Pork Products	Feb 28, 2005
007-2005, 19-Ounce Cans Of "World Classics Brand, Wedding Bell Soup With Meat Balls And Chicken"	Feb 17, 2005

1 Click on e-mail [subscription link](#)

5 New users see additional subscription options

- ☐ Regulations and Policies
  - ☐ Codex News & Comments Requested
- ☐ Export Information
  - ☐ Eligible U.S. Establishments by Country
  - ☐ Export Information
  - ☐ Export Requirements for Meat & Poultry Products
  - ☐ Index of Export Related Policies
- ☐ Federal Register Publications & Related Documents
  - ☐ Federal Register Notices Index
  - ☐ Interim & Final Rules Index
  - ☐ Notices Index
  - ☐ Notices & Notices Index
  - ☐ Publications Index
  - ☐ 5000 Series - Program Services
  - ☐ 5000 Series - Regulatory Information

2 Enter e-mail address

USDA United States Department of Agriculture  
Food Safety and Inspection Service

Hello! To subscribe to this free service or to modify your profile, please enter your email address.

E-mail Address

4 Receive confirmation

**Success**

You have successfully subscribed to the Open Federal Cases document.

3 Confirm e-mail address (password optional)

USDA United States Department of Agriculture  
Food Safety and Inspection Service

**New User**

**Primary E-mail Address**

You must enter a Primary E-mail Address. This is your login.

Enter E-mail address

Confirm E-mail address

**Optional Password**

☐ I do not want a password.  
☐ I would like to add password protection for my subscriber profile.

Enter Password

Confirm Password

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## Promoting an E-mail Subscription Management Service

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If you follow the above suggestions on subscription links and their placement, graphics, and descriptions, you will limit the need for additional promotion. However, promoting your service internally and externally can generate large jumps in your subscriber base and help ensure that key users sign up for the service. Here is where promotion is helpful:

- Internal and external e-mail lists
- Newsletters (e-mail and paper)
- Media (press releases with direct links to subscription options)

Internal and external e-mail lists are excellent sources of subscribers because the lists identify people who have already expressed interest in receiving information from your agency. Provide direct links to the subscription sign-up page in e-mails to list members. The same logic applies to newsletters. Subscribers are interested in receiving information from your agency and are therefore likely to sign up for e-mail alerts. Providing a brief description of the service, in addition to providing the link, is an excellent way to get people to sign up. You can also easily import e-mail lists into your ESM system.

Targeting media can help generate subscribers. First, post a press release to your website. Next, you can use that press release to alert other media targets of your new service. Here are some suggested media targets:

- a. Community newspapers
- b. Regional newspapers
- c. Appropriate trade publications
- d. Business media

### **Beyond Basic Promotion**

Once your organization has implemented the recommendations above, there are still additional opportunities to boost subscription numbers. Here are some other ways to increase subscription rates:

- a. Special Promotions and/or Contests
- b. Targeted Mailings
- c. Advertising
- d. Phone Messages for People Calling In

Providing incentives for people to sign up can double subscription rates. While not an option for some government bodies, the Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon (TriMet) promoted their subscription service on the front page of their website two months in a row with a call-out box describing

the service. The first month, they did not provide an incentive for signing up, which resulted in the standard monthly sign up rate. The following month, they added an incentive to be entered in a drawing for a monthly pass, and the subscription rate doubled! Other successful incentives include drawings for coffee shop gift certificates, other restaurant gift certificates, and agency-related promotional items.

Targeted mailings, such as sending postcards to specific zip codes, can also result in a boost in subscriptions. Keeping the communication simple and to the point is critical.

Advertising the service in select publications, newsletters, and local newsletters is another way to effectively promote your service. Public sector agencies can often negotiate a lower rate due to their non-profit status.

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## **Summary**

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ESM systems can be highly effective in reaching citizens and providing them with information. Yet people rarely seek out subscription services on their own. For this reason, your success depends on your ability to target users, identify their specific interests and needs, bring your services to their attention, and let them subscribe quickly and easily.

While no subscription services are identical, they all adhere to the same basic principle: The better the promotion, the more subscribers. The more closely you follow the methods described above, the more likely you are to reach your audience and generate more subscriptions.

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## ***GovDelivery*<sup>®</sup>: The E-mail Subscription Management Pioneer**

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*GovDelivery*<sup>®</sup> is the first and only e-mail subscription management system developed for the public sector. Initially deployed on a government website in early 2001, it is still the only e-mail subscription management system designed specifically for the public sector. *GovDelivery* also is the only e-mail subscription management approach that is completely turnkey or “out-of-the-box”, meaning that it requires no hardware or software installation to setup and manage. The only set-up required is posting links on the agency website. *GovDelivery* is a web-based system that uses proprietary technology, Page Watch, to monitor the website to detect content changes. When an update is identified, an e-mail alert with a direct link to new information is sent to interested citizens or to an administrator for approval prior to sending. In addition, e-mail alerts can be sent manually to subscribers at anytime.

Today, over 50 government bodies in the U.S. and U.K. use *GovDelivery*. The system is in use by clients of all sizes ranging from local governments with fewer than 10,000 residents to the large central government agencies. Clients of note include the U.S. Departments of Labor, State and Agriculture, both Houses of the U.K. Parliament, the U.K. Highways Agency, major agencies and transit authorities in eight U.S. states, Maricopa County, AZ, and Washington D.C.

